

2012 Public Safety Budget Community Conversations

Table 2 with Councilmembers Burgess and O'Brien - Summary of Responses
Monday, May 23, 2011, Delridge Community Center

Question 1: Public safety - police and fire - is an important City service, funded entirely by city tax dollars and historically one of the last places the City makes budget reductions. This means larger cuts must be taken from other important city services, like libraries, human services and parks, some of which have some other funding sources and some of which do not. Should the City continue to prioritize public safety funding, and why?

People at the table asked that the city share with the community our plan to save money. Show what different alternatives we look at.

Question 2: What City-funded services contribute to a feeling of safety in your neighborhood? How might these tight budget times change the way the City thinks about how to address crime and how to address the factors that contribute to criminal activity?

- Community Centers: In general we need to change the way we view criminal activity and our response. We need to move toward a prevention model. Programs at community centers are examples of prevention services.
- The speed at which police officers and fire fighters respond to calls and problems in neighborhoods contributes to the feeling of safety.
- When officers come to community meetings and introduce themselves.
- Neighborhood beat cops
- Safety is a clean environment.
- A well lit street. The international district needs better lights. They are dim and when there is construction the lights go out completely. (The new LED lights are loud which is a downside.)
- Park Rangers contribute to the feeling of safety.

Question 3: Which of these goals for a police department is most important to you, and why?

- a. Reduce crime**
- b. Reduce the fear of crime**
- c. Respond quickly to 911 calls for service**
- d. Provide public safety services cost-effectively**

Summary of responses:

- Prevention/intervention up front can reduce all of these.
- Provide public safety, cost effectively.
- Foot patrol makes a huge difference to neighborhoods and businesses

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- Police are over taxed already. Neighbors can help reduce police costs by doing things themselves. For example, one participant said that a business camera caught a gang-tagging incident and police were using the footage to help with the case. Another watchful neighbor caught the license plate #.
- It would be helpful to have a community liaison, not necessarily a uniformed officer, to work with the community on crime prevention.
- We also need to balance people's expectations for police department. Police cannot do everything and don't have the capacity to respond at all times. We should educate the public on how to use police services and what police respond to.

Question 4: Other than core police and fire department functions, what other public safety programs do you consider most important? (Examples include domestic violence programs, block watch coordination, drug diversion programs, etc.)

- Engaging community-block watch other forums to talk about safety issues.
- Prevention programming: diversion programs, community court, mental health services.
- Human Services
- Community Centers

[At this point there was a side conversation on improving program evolution and defunding programs that don't measure up. Most people at the table were ok with this model.]

Question 5: Would you be willing to pay more in taxes to avoid a reduction in services to the fire department?

Most people answered "yes" to the question but they wanted clarity and more information:

- How effectively and efficiently is the fire department running right now?
- Is there room for efficiencies? If so, could we make changes to reduce costs?
- Would we be willing to have smaller crews?

The general public might be willing to pay more taxes if they knew that police/fire were functioning efficiently.